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ABSTRACT

In response to large numbers of returning adult students, Wisconsin's technical college system has placed an increased emphasis on school-to-work transition and innovative forms of distance education (DE). DE began in Europe at least 150 years ago through correspondence programs, expanded to include radio programs in the 1920s and 1930s, and moved to television programs with the development of satellite technology in the 1980s. Wisconsin's Northcentral Technical College began offering satellite television courses in 1986 and has provided interactive distance classes to 16,119 students since 1989. Data on these students indicate that 39% are between 26-40 years of age, 42% are not assigned to a particular program, 31% attend part-time, 28% attend full-time, 49% take courses to earn credit for a degree, and 34% take courses for occupational improvement. While much of the research conducted on DE has focused on learners and their motivations, little research has been done on faculty perceptions. Some faculty remain resistant to DE because of the increased workload it can represents, pay issues, authorship issues, technical and clerical support, problems in engaging students, loss of faculty autonomy, and threatened job security. Faculty in the future, however, are likely to see their roles change from creators of instruction to managers of resources. (HAA)

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ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED:

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT WHEN USING DISTANCE EDUCATION?

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Background: Peg has taught at the high school, technical college, associate degree, baccalaureate and graduate levels. In private industry, Peg worked in administrative support and as a translator for a corporation involved in worldwide exporting of pneumatic conveying equipment. She also spent ten years working in export sales and marketing for a major window and door manufacturer.

Currently, she splits her time between teaching social sciences and international business courses and working as a curriculum specialist at Northcentral Technical College in Wausau, Wisconsin. She has extensive experience teaching via interactive television delivered to a number of regional sites and has facilitated a variety of courses in a number of formats. She also is an adjunct faculty member of Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin teaching economics and business courses in a compressed format.

Interest Areas: Distance education, accelerative learning, change theory, changing, faculty roles in the technical and community colleges and internationalizing curriculum to reflect the global society in which we live.

The workplace is becoming increasingly culturally diverse while simultaneously requiring increased technical skills of the workforce. Because technology quickly becomes obsolete, technical education is slowly moving towards a new emphasis on interpersonal and critical thinking skills that can be used in the workplace As the specific technology becomes obsolete in the workplace, employee interpersonal and critical thinking skills become more important as new technology is selected and installed. The rapidly changing technology and design of the workplace continues to bring larger number of returning adults and increased diversity into the technical and community college system as they upgrade skills or re-career. Traditional educational approaches such as standard length semesters, daily classes, traditional classroom approach, "normal" timeframes in which to earn a degree, etc. are not always the most effective approach with returning adults and a variety of alternative delivery/distance learning methods have been developed. These methods include live-interactive television, computer conferencing, telecourses, accelerative learning, directed and independent study, open entry classes, and the increased use of educational technology in the classroom.

While correspondence courses have been used in the United States as a form of distance learning for some time, the United States has lagged behind other countries of the world in the development of formal distance learning institutions such as the Open University system in the British influenced countries. However, the technical college system in Wisconsin with its open entry might be considered a form of an open university.

Returning adult students now comprise 89% of the student body of the Wisconsin Technical College System. While they are commonly referred to as the non-traditional student, they have become the "traditional" student in numbers. However, they are not necessarily best served by the traditional methods of instruction and delivery. Consequently, even while the numbers of full-time equivalent students were increasing, the numbers of full-time students have decreased while the number of part-time students have increased. Increased emphasis is also being placed on the school to work transition for adult students of all ages and technical education is being influenced by works such as the report of The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, AMERICA'S CHOICE: HIGH SKILLS, HIGH WAGES (National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990). Education is also being influenced by the current welfare reform movement which is forcing numbers of people, primarily women and refugees, into the labor force with little or no training as well as the low unemployment rate. The needs of business and industry for increased employee training can be expected to increase.

Distance education in the United States had consisted largely of correspondence courses. However, other countries have used a variety of delivery methods through distance education to reach adult learners not served by the traditional system. In China, for example, where all "seats" in the university system are taken with students entering the university system as traditional students, distance

education centers have been set up throughout the country and teachers are able to upgrade skills and meet new certification standards through courses offered through distance education.

The roots of distance education are at least 150 years old. An advertisement in a Swedish newspaper in 1833 touted the opportunity to study "Composition through the medium of the Post" (Holmberg, 1986). Correspondence study crossed the Atlantic in 1873, with the founding by Anna Eliot Ticknor of a Boston-based society to encourage study at home. The school attracted more than 10,000 students in 24 years (Watkins, 1991). Students of the classical curriculum corresponded monthly with teachers, who offered guided readings and frequent tests.

In Europe, technological advances introduced the use of audio tapes and laboratory kits to distance education. In the United States, at least 176 radio stations were constructed at educational institutions in the 1920's although most were discontinued by 1930. Those that survived were generally at land-grant colleges. Experimental television teaching programs were produced at the University of Iowa, Purdue University and Kansas State College in the l930's but it was not until the 1950's that college credit courses were offered via broadcast television.

Satellite technology was developed in the 1960's and made cost effective in the 1980's. Satellite television began at Northcentral technical College in 1986. Today NTC delivers interactive classes between the main campus in Wausau and NTC's six regional campuses. In addition, NTC is a member of several networks including WONDER which links a number of Wisconsin technical and four-year campuses and the Central Wisconsin Educational television Network (CWETN) which provides links from NTC to highschools in surrounding communities. Since 1989 16,119 individuals (729.53 full-time equivalent students) have taken a total of 575 ITV courses with an average number of students per class of twenty eight (28). During this same period, 7,975 of the students have been enrolled in ITV classes off the main Wausau campus with an average of 14 students per class coming from the regional campuses. Students from regional campuses represent 51% of the students enrolling in ITV classes.

Data on students attending ITV classes indicate that 77% are female, 39% are 26-40 years of age and 35% are 19-25 years of age. Student status indicates 42% of students are not assigned to a particular program, 31% are part-time students and 28% are full-time students of a program.

When asked the reason for attending 49% are taking ITV courses to earn credit towards a degree and 34% are taking courses for occupational improvement. Most students taking ITV courses are employed with 28% employed over 40 hours per week and 24% employed 20-30 per week.

As of June, l995, ninety-four (94) instructors at NTC have taught ITV classes with 42% (40) of the instructors being full-time faculty and 58% (54) part-time or

call-staff instructors. The question arises why other instructors haven't taught via interactive television.

A high percentage (86%) of students responded yes, they would take another ITV course. Of those enrolled in spring 1992, 37% had previously taken an ITV class. The majority (85%) rated the overall functioning of the system as excellent to good. Benefits of taking a ITV class over a traditional class noted by students included the ability to share with students from other campuses and communities, not having to travel one-two hours to Wausau, the convenience of a local classroom, availability of courses for small numbers, good quality instructors, and selection of courses. One student commented, "I really like the closeness and extra time this allows me. I don't like driving 70 miles to wausau every day, that's three hours more of my life."

Two philosophies of distance education became identifiable. The first emphasized the free pacing of progress throughout the program by the student. The second offered a more rigid schedule of weekly lessons (Holmberg, 1986).

Much of the research in distance learning and alternative delivery has focused on the learner and adults have been found to have needs that are not always best met by the traditional technical education system. Research has focused on what motivates adults to return to school and whether their needs are met by the traditional education system. Such research has provided limited insight into determining what the implications are for the expansion of alternative curricula options.

Little research, however, has focused on faculty perceptions of the adaptations that may need to be made in curriculum and delivery in order to adapt to the changing educational scene. This is readily apparent in the Wisconsin Technical College System where adults are being retrained to meet to upgrade their skills to meet the needs of the changing technology in the workplace. Yet, some faculty remain resistant to expanded use of technology in the classroom, the use or courses prepared outside the institution or to alternative methods of delivery.

Much of the discussion and concern revolves around the changing role of faculty in today's electronic age and declining availability of funds.

Keegan (1986) suggested three questions must be answered in order to develop a theory of distance education:

1. Is distance education an educational activity?
2. Is distance education a form of conventional education?
3. Is distance education possible? Is it a contradiction in terms?

Central to Keegan's concept of distance education is the separation of the teaching acts in time and place from the learning acts. "The inersubjectivity of teacher and

learner, in which learning from teaching occurs has to be artificially recreated. (Keegan, 1988).

The development and study of distance education have been hampered by the lack of a generally accepted theory of distance education (Scholosser & Anderson, 1994). theories proposed generally fall into two categories. The first are theories such as Perraton's which attempt to explain distance education by drawing on existing theories of education and communication. The second group are theories created "from scratch" such as Peters which have been shaped by the experiences of the researchers who have approached distance education form their own angle and created a particular paradigm of distance education (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

Part of the problem of theories based on the researcher's experience in distance education is that there are so many forms of distance education. Distance education as practiced at the FernUniversitat in Germany may be very different from the distance education practiced at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa, the University of Iowa or Northcentral Technical College.

At the root of distance education theory is the belief that distance education is fundamentally different from traditional, face-to-face instruction. Perhaps this is true when the form is correspondence study compared to a traditional classroom. But in the United States, technological advances and new philosophies of distance education have resulted in a new paradigm of distance education. Its goal then becomes offering the distance student an experience a much like that of traditional, face-to-face instruction as possible. this is particularly true in interactive television which feature intact classrooms and live, two-way interaction from a number of sites. And it can be true with courses delivered via the internet in which two-way interaction is achieved keyboard to keyboard.

In the end, good education pedagogy is good pedagogy in any "classroom," regardless of how the classroom is configured. In the future and perhaps already today, good education theory and good distance education theory are one and the same thing.

Many faculty participate in distance education; however, a number of faculty remain strongly resistant to participating in interactive television, telephone conferencing or on-line conferencing teaching. What factors cause this resistance? My experience tells me that faculty view teaching via interactive television as considerable more work than teaching in a traditional classroom. There is a need for more advance preparation because materials must be distributed to the various sites in advance. The quality of overheads and the need for more graphics often requires a greater knowledge of and ability to use technology than teaching in a traditional classroom. faculty issues tend to revolve around the following issues

1. Additional amount of work and energy to adapt teaching methods for distance

education teaching.

2. Pay issues - How should teaching in distance education be compensated and how many students can be reasonable accommodated in a distance education course?
3. Authorship issues and control of use of materials developed by faculty
4. Technical and clerical support available
5. The question then becomes "how to engage the learner."
6. Distance learning technology comfort level
7. Loss of faculty autonomy in guiding the course
8. Job security
9. Role of faculty - Will faculty spend more of their time on preparation and development of materials than in classroom teaching?

The goal of learning remains the same regardless of the method of delivery of instruction. Effective teaching and effective learning experiences can be had in traditional as well as distance learning situtations. Given the increased use of educational technology to meet the needs of adult students and a lack of agreement on the role of faculty in responding to those needs with the use of technology, faculty are likely to increasingly see their roles as instrutors as being reduced from creators of instruction to managers of resources and students, from a role of speaking for themselves to a disemenator of others' views.

Engaging the learner remains a challenge for all learning facilitators. Perhaps the larger questions become, is it the learner or the teacher-facilitator that is disengaged and needs to be engaged? Engaging the disengaged can be enhanced through accerative learning techniques and methods. Specific techniques and philosophies of engagement will be explored at the concurrent session at the conference.